12 Dogwood Lane
Brevard, NC 28712
October 29, 1990

Dear Shirt-free Revolutionaries,

How affirming to read of your August action that challenges the idea that only men can take off their shirts to be comfortable! We share many of your expressed feelings (as reported in The Edge) about this issue and are working to change New York State law which prohibits women from being shirt-free in public. In NYS, nursing mothers and women"entertaining" are exempt from this law.

In 1986, 7 women went to trial in Rochester, NY for refusing to put on their shirts. They were acquitted on First Amendment grounds, but that case is now under appeal by the Monroe County D.A. In 1987 and 1988, "top-free" picnics were held in Rochester parks with no complaints or legal actions taken against the participants. In 1989, an outing was held at Durand Beach near Rochester with about 70 women, men and children attending. Thirty to 40 women were top-free as we swam, sunned and enjoyed the day on the beach. Police arrived (see copy of "Statement of Facts" enclosed) and ultimately 10 women refused to put on their shirts and were arrested. At our trial in December 1989, we were found guilty. Ms. O'Brien-Dovan was nursing her child and thus had charges dropped against her although she, too, had been arrested. At this trial, our defense was based on the unconstitutionality of the law. We are presently trying to appeal the verdict.

The Rochester area group C.L.A.W. (Challenging Laws and Attitudes against Women), of which we are a part, was formed this year. We separated from the original group, Coalition for Top-free Equality, because we wanted to focus on top-free equality as a feminist issue and to have women making the decisions on actions, legal defense and publicity.

On August 5, the day after your action at B.B.Clarke beach, we held a C.L.A.W. action at a local festival in Rochester. Because most of us in the group were on probation as a result of the December trial, we did not want to risk arrest again at this time. Our action, therefore, consisted of "ticketing" men who were shirt-free (see yellow card enclosed) to raise consciousness on the discriminatory nature of the law. We also gave out literature on our issue and offered people a change to sign a petition directed towards eliminating the unconstitutional law in NYS.

Currently, we are networking with women around NYS and the northeast region to build interest in having a big action on August 3, 1991. We are also working on developing ideas about the inter-relationship between top-free equality and other feminist issues, particularly harassment of women. We hope to start a dialog on this with other feminists through various women's publications. (see copy of letter sent to several women's papers)

Please let us know how your trial turns out and how your defense was presented. Let C.L.A.W. know if there are things we can do to help. Also, please consider the possibility of having another action on 8/3/91 with the idea that it would be part of a nation-wide "day of shirt-free action". We feel certain that there are many women in our country who wish to have the same option that men do to take off their shirts. We need to connect with each other, support each other and share our experiences and strategies for working for basic fairness in the way we live our lives.

By the way, we (the writers of this letter) learned about your action by reading The Edge. Friends of Kathie's brother brought him a copy (he lives in Minnesota) and he sent it to Kathie. We moved here to NC in early October but continue to be in close touch with other C.L.A.W. members in Rochester, NY. We are sending word of your action to them and hope that you will be in direct contact with them. The address is:

C.L.A.W.
P.O. Box 10720
Rochester, NY 14610

Good luck in the struggle we share with you.

Lynn Hiller Kathie Reilly